



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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Washington Report  
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September 3, 1980

## NEW YEAR THOUGHTS ON SOVIET JEWRY

For more than a decade I have devoted my Passover and Rosh Hoshanah columns to the plight of Soviet Jewry. It is at these Holiday times of family and community reunification that we feel the most intense sorrow over the fact that our Jewish brethren can neither join us nor celebrate our sacred rites amongst themselves.

The last year has been an extremely bad one for the Jews of the Soviet Union. In 1978 33,505 Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union during the first eight months of the year. During the first eight months of 1980 the figure plummeted to 16,168 -- down from 1979 by almost 50% and a low point for the entire decade.

For much of the year Soviet officials used the excuse of the Olympics to bring an almost complete standstill to the processing of Jewish applications for exit visas. There has also been an important tightening of the requirements for exit visas during the past year. Until this year Soviet authorities frequently granted reunification of families even if the relatives in the West were as distant as perhaps an aunt, uncle or grandparents. Now the government insists that relatives with whom the Jew applying for an exit visa intends to be reunited be of the "first degree". Relatives of the first degree include only such close kin as parents, children and spouses.

Just this past year the Soviets developed a new strategy under which Jews are praised and told how much they are needed when they apply to leave. Those awaiting exit visas who are willing to withdraw their applications and "repent" the "sin" of trying to escape are promised that their crime will be forgiven.

For most of the celebrated underground leadership and long-time refuseniks conditions worsened during the past year. Such world-famous

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victims of Soviet terror as Anatoly Shcharansky, Ida Nudel, Professor Pavel Abramovich, Vladimir Prestin and Vladimir Slepak, all continue to live under harsh conditions with no relief in sight. Vladimir Kislik continues to be persecuted despite his imprisonment in a psychiatric institution amid the world-wide indignation this measure provoked.

In Jewish neighborhoods in Los Angeles synagogues, movie theatres, social halls and banquet rooms will be packed as even those Jews distant from formal religious practice yearn to hear the sounding of the shofar or the chant of the ancient Kol Nidre melody.

In Moscow, a city with more than a quarter of a million Jews life will proceed as usual. The single central synagogue will be open. The worshipers will be mainly old people not intimidated by the threats of how religious or nationalist behavior can destroy one's educational or career planning. The vast majority of Jews will be afraid to absent themselves from their jobs on the Jewish holidays. Holiday absences, even if covered with a bona fide health excuse, are dangerous and can result in loss of one's job or retaliation against one's family.

Our sages call the shofar "the Horn of Redemption". Surely our prayers will include a plea for the redemption of Soviet Jews from the harsh enslavement under which they suffer.

To all my friends and constituents, my best wishes for a Healthy and a Happy New Year. May the New Year bring peace in the Middle East and throughout the world. May the yoke of oppression be lifted from downtrodden people everywhere.

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